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ONE HUNDRED NINTH CONGRESS

Congress of the United States

House of Representatives

COMMITTEE ON THE JUDICIARY

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WASHINGTON, DC 20515-6216

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<http://www.house.gov/judiciary>

October 6, 2005

Mr. Greg Anderson
President
Salem Radio Network
6400 N. Beltline Road, Suite 210
Irving, TX 75063

Dear Mr. Anderson:

I am in receipt your October 4 reply (enclosed) to my letter, signed by 56 of my colleagues, about remarks by Bill Bennett, a radio host employed by your company.

Frankly speaking, I believe your letter completely misses the point of why I and many others – including representatives from both the White House and the Republican National Committee and some of your sponsors – found these remarks so offensive. That is, in and of itself, disturbing.

Mr. Bennett gratuitously injected racial stereotyping into a conversation with a caller about social security and abortion, stating that aborting black babies would reduce the crime rate. Regardless of whether he intended to offer serious consideration of the idea of aborting every black baby, and that he said later that it would be “impossible, ridiculous, and morally reprehensible” to do so, Mr. Bennett stood by his contention that to do so would result in a lower crime rate, thus perpetuating the negative stereotype that African-Americans are criminals. That I find to be a great problem; and, to date, neither you nor Mr. Bennett have explained why such stereotyping was needed or even bothered to apologize for linking race with crime in such a discriminatory fashion.

You and Mr. Bennett should know African-Americans do not commit the majority of crimes in the United States. Moreover, *Freakonomics*, the book that Bennett cited to advance his argument, does not address race at all - that was solely Bennett's contribution. Steven Levitt, one of the book's authors, offered the following refutation of Bennett's comments immediately after they were aired:

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“(A) white person and a black person who grow up next door to each other with similar incomes and the same family structure would be predicted to have the same crime involvement.”

I continue to look forward to receiving your company’s response to the linkage of race and crime by Mr. Bennett as well as a list of sponsors for Mr. Bennett’s show.

Please respond to my Judiciary Committee Office, 2142 Rayburn House Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20515, tel. 202-225-6504, fax 202-225-4423.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "John Conyers, Jr." in a cursive style.

John Conyers, Jr.
Ranking Member

Enclosure



Greg R. Anderson, President
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October 4, 2005

The Honorable John Conyers
Congress of the United States
2142 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Transmitted Via Fax 10/4/05: 202,225-4423
Original sent via U.S. Mail

Dear Congressman Conyers:

Your letter was received via fax at 6:29 p.m. on Friday, September 30, after our offices had closed for the day. A copy of your fax was handed to me Monday morning, so I was not able to respond sooner.

If Bill Bennett had advocated what your one sentence quote suggests, your outrage would be understandable and justified. I listened to the entire segment live as it occurred, and I can assure you that is not what happened. Sadly, some Internet media sources took selected portions of the exchange, including the sentence that you quoted, completely out of context to suggest just what your outrage justly condemns.

You mentioned that Dr. Bennett later acknowledged such abortions would be morally reprehensible. In fact, he did not *later* acknowledge that; it was included in the same breath that his hypothetical statement was uttered and was clearly the qualifying context of the statement. In the strongest terms he said, "That would be an impossible, ridiculous, and morally reprehensible thing to do..." The broader context and backdrop of his discussion were the positions on crime and abortion which were discussed in the *New York Times* bestseller, *Freakonomics*. By lifting that one sentence out of context, it would appear to suggest that Dr. Bennett is advocating a position that is the opposite of what he actually said.

Undoubtedly, Dr. Bennett's hypothetical could have been made in a way that would have been less open to distortion and misunderstanding; but by its very nature, talk radio is spontaneous and unscripted. There is always the risk of misunderstanding. As you acknowledged, however, the chilling of free speech is in no one's best interest.

Dr. Bennett's record on civil rights is well-documented. In the 1960s his teaching contract was denied at the University of Southern Mississippi for advocating the philosophy of Dr. Martin Luther King. He has a significant and considerable body of published work. He has a long and distinguished record of service in both the public and private sectors. He was confirmed to Cabinet positions on multiple occasions by the United States Senate with support from both sides of the aisle. He has long been recognized for his efforts to advance social justice and racial equality and for his consistent opposition to abortion. As Secretary of Education he won acclaim for his efforts to provide choice in education to poor and minority students—the same educational options as those more privileged. As Drug Czar he worked tirelessly to remove drugs from the inner-city. Since leaving the public sector he has

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actively supported the work of his wife, Elayne, in a program she established which is dedicated to providing education and life opportunities to children in the inner-city. His public record of over 35 years should confirm the fact that some have either purposely or innocently responded to statements that were distortions of Dr. Bennett's lifelong positions.

We desire to encourage a robust exchange of ideas, but we would never condone racial bigotry, or ethnic discrimination. When taken out of context, we understand these comments were controversial for some and offensive to others; that was not our intent, and I am certain it was not Dr. Bennett's intent. He is among the fairest and kindest men I know.

I am attaching a complete copy of the transcript of this exchange between Dr. Bennett and the caller in which this controversy arose and also a copy of Dr. Bennett's statement that he issued on September 30, 2005, about the matter.

The Salem Radio Network is firm in our commitment to social and racial justice. We oppose bigotry in all forms. Our desire is to offer programming that addresses pressing community problems in a manner that will contribute to their solution. Like you and your colleagues, we also take our responsibility for truth and fairness seriously. This is an ongoing process to which your response makes a helpful contribution. I appreciate the opportunity to clarify the record.

Sincerely,



Greg R. Anderson
President
Salem Radio Network

GRA:sm

Attachments

From the Desk of William J. Bennett
September 30, 2005

"On Wednesday, a caller to my radio show proposed the idea that one good argument for the pro-life position would be that if we didn't have abortions, Social Security would be solvent. I stated my doubts about such a thesis, as well as my opposition to such a form of argument (the audio of the call is available at my Website: bennettmornings.com).

"I then stated that such extrapolations of this argument can cut both ways, and cited the current bestseller, *Freakonomics*, which discusses the authors' thesis that abortion reduces crime.

"Then, putting my philosophy professor's hat on, I went on to reveal the limitations of such arguments by showing the absurdity in another such argument, along the same lines. I entertained what law school professors call 'the Socratic method' and what I would hope good social science professors still use in their seminars. In so doing, I suggested a hypothetical analogy while at the same time saying the proposition I was using about blacks and abortion was 'impossible, ridiculous, and morally reprehensible,' just to ensure those who would have any doubt about what they were hearing, or for those who tuned in to the middle of the conversation.

"The issues of crime and race have been on many people's minds, and tongues, for the past month or so--in light of the situation in New Orleans; and the issues of race, crime, and abortion are well aired and ventilated in articles, the academy, the think tank community, and public policy. Indeed the whole issue of crime and race is not new in social science, nor popular literature. One of the authors of *Freakonomics*, himself, had an extended exchange on the discussion of these issues on the Internet some years back--which was also much debated in the think tank community in Washington.

"A thought experiment about public policy, on national radio, should not have received the condemnations it has. Anyone paying attention to this debate should be offended by those who have selectively quoted me, distorted my meaning, and taken out of context the dialogue I engaged in this week. Such distortions from 'leaders' of organizations and parties is a disgrace not only to the organizations and institutions they serve, but to the First Amendment.

"In sum, let me reiterate what I had hoped my long career had already established: that I renounce all forms of bigotry--and that my record in trying to provide opportunities for, as well as save the lives of, minorities in this country stands up just fine."

Transcript from Bill Bennett's *Morning in America*, Wednesday,
September 28, 2005

CALLER: I noticed the national media, you know, they talk a lot about the loss of revenue, or the inability of the government to fund Social Security, and I was curious, and I've read articles in recent months here, that the abortions that have happened since *Roe v. Wade*, the lost revenue from the people who have been aborted in the last 30-something years, could fund Social Security as we know it today. And the media just doesn't -- never touches this at all.

BENNETT: Assuming they're all productive citizens?

CALLER: Assuming that they are. Even if only a portion of them were, it would be an enormous amount of revenue.

BENNETT: Maybe, maybe, but we don't know what the costs would be, too. I think as -- abortion disproportionately occur among single women? No?

CALLER: I don't know the exact statistics, but quite a bit are, yeah.

BENNETT: All right, well, I mean, I just don't know. I would not argue for the pro-life position based on this, because you don't know. I mean, it cuts both -- you know, one of the arguments in this book *Freakonomics* that they make is that the declining crime rate, you know, they deal with this hypothesis, that one of the reasons crime is down is that abortion is up. Well --

CALLER: Well, I don't think that statistic is accurate.

BENNETT: Well, I don't think it is either, I don't think it is either, because first of all, there is just too much that you don't know. But I do know that it's true that if you wanted to reduce crime, you could -- if that were your sole purpose, you could abort every black baby in this country, and your crime rate would go down. That would be an impossible, ridiculous, and morally reprehensible thing to do, but your crime rate would go down. So these far-out, these far-reaching, extensive extrapolations are, I think, tricky.